



Message From State Director Rob Steptoe

USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans.

We offer a full range of rural development financial services in West Virginia for housing, business, technical assistance, utilities and community facilities.

USDA Rural Development looks forward to continued success building partnerships with you and all rural West Virginia communities.

Proudly serving rural America for over 70 years, we aggressively commit our resources and knowledge to you in an effort to fulfill our vision, "A rural America that is a healthy, safe and prosperous place to live and work."

This newsletter will provide you with a news summary of key USDA Rural Development events in West Virginia, contact information and valuable program updates.

It goes without saying, this newsletter is being developed with you, the customer, in mind. It is our hope that it will become an invaluable resource for you and your community.

We want you to know more about our programs and what we can do for you and your community. West Virginia Rural Development's dedicated and highly-skilled employees are readily available and eager to work with you to meet our goal of building viable and sustainable rural communities. Together, we can remain "Committed to the Future of Rural Communities."



Please do not hesitate to contact one of our local offices or call the West Virginia State Office on our toll-free line, 1-800-295-8228, to be put in touch with the appropriate personnel serving your area and needs.

You can also find detailed information about West Virginia USDA Rural Development on the world wide web at:
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>.

Inside this issue:

Rural Development County Office Hours Announced	2
Martinsburg Home Show	3
Distance Learning Grants Awarded	3, 4 and 6
WV Rural Development Employees Exhibit Outreach at WV EXPO	4
Rural Development Funding Availability Announced	5-9
Water System Improvements Underway for Clay County	6
USDA Rural Development Extends Partnership with West Virginia State University	7
Contact Information	10
"Celebrating Community: A Tribute to Black Fraternal, Social & Civic Institutions"	10

Lavalette PSD Groundbreaking Held

Lavalette Public Service District celebrated the start of construction on their U.S. Route 52 North Waterline Extension Project with a groundbreaking ceremony on February 27, 2006.

USDA Rural Development leveraged Rural Utilities Program loans of \$2,713,000 with other

funding in the amount of \$3,118,050 to provide potable water service to approximately 208 new customers in rural Wayne County, West Virginia.

The project will consist of approximately 122,300 feet of waterline, one water storage tank, one booster pump station,

fire hydrants, valves and other necessary appurtenances.

In West Virginia, USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Programs administer a water and wastewater loan and grant program to improve the quality of life and promote economic development in rural areas.



Pictured to the left (l to r): Darrell Wellman (General Manager of Lavalette PSD), Rick Wellman (Wayne County Commissioner), William Willis (Lavalette PSD Board Member), Rob Steptoe (Rural Development State Director), Greg Parsons (Congressman Rahall's representative), Tammy Stollings (Governor Joe Manchin's representative), Charles Sammons (Wayne County Commission President), H. Truman Chafin (State Senator), Jim Booten (Wayne County Commissioner) and Ed Robinson (E. L. Robinson Engineering Company).

Today, Rural Development is the venture capitalist for rural America, built on the legacy of Depression-era agencies begun over 70 years ago.

Rural Development Offers Office Hours in McDowell, Mercer, Raleigh and Wyoming Counties

Special Point of Interest

- USDA Rural Development invested over **\$130 Million** in rural West Virginia during Fiscal Year 2005. Visit our website to view our Annual Report and see how this money was invested.

"During the current period of prevailing high fuel costs, the opening of a sub-office will provide a more convenient location with less travel expense to local area customers for applying and receiving services under Rural Development's various loan and grant programs," stated Wendell Alt, Rural Development Specialist.

State Director Robert M. Step-toe, III, announced that in an effort to accommodate more rural West Virginians, Rural Development will hold office hours in Kimball, McDowell County, WV, every first (1st) Monday of the month, effective March 2006.

Rural Development will be available in the SHED, Inc. (Safe Housing & Economic Development, Inc.) office in Kimball, WV located at 16 Chestnut Street at Norwood Bottom, (telephone 304-585-7419 or 304-585-7440) from 9:00 a.m. to Noon. During the afternoons, fieldwork and outreach will be conducted in the McDowell County area.

Rural Development will hold

office hours in Beckley, Raleigh County, WV, every Wednesday of the month, effective immediately.

Rural Development will be available in the USDA Agricultural Service Center located at 471 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV (telephone 304-252-4343; fax 304-252-5809; TTY/TDD 304-284-4836) from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Rural Development will hold office hours in Pineville, Wyoming County, WV, every Friday of the month, effective immediately.

Rural Development will be available in Room 103 of the Pineville U.S. Post Office located on

Main Street (telephone 304-732-8855; fax 304-732-9140; TTY/TDD 304-284-4836) from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Princeton Rural Development Office has recently moved from its location on Gott Road to 241 Mercer Springs Road, Suite A, Princeton, WV 24740. That office is now located in the Forestry Building, just off Exit 14 of I-77 at the Athens exit.

Representatives will be available to discuss Rural Development programs with the public, take applications and assist existing customers. You can contact Rural Development in the Princeton office via telephone at 304-487-1402; fax 304-425-0695; TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.

Rural Development Also Offers Office Hours In Monroe and Pocahontas Counties

USDA Rural Development will begin offering office hours in Monroe and Pocahontas Counties in their continued efforts to accommodate more rural West Virginians.

Staff will be available in Monroe County from 10:00 AM to Noon every third (3rd) Thursday of the month, effective April 2006, in the conference room of the USDA Service Center located at 190 Highway 3 East, Union, WV 24983. To contact that office

during these hours, you may call 304-772-3006 or fax 304-772-3260.

Pocahontas County office hours are also 10:00 AM to Noon, but they will be offered on the fourth (4th) Thursday of each month, effective April 2006, in the conference room of the USDA Service Center located 2 miles south of Marlinton on Route 219 at RR 2, Box 51A, Buckeye, WV 24924. To contact that office during these

hours, you may call 304-799-4317 or fax 304-799-7289.

Rural Development representatives will be available to discuss their programs with the public, take applications and assist existing customers.

You can also contact Rural Development in the Lewisburg office at 179 Northridge Drive, Lewisburg, WV 24901 (telephone 304-645-7422; fax 304-647-9627; and TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.)

Grant County Office Hours Announced

Wendell Alt, Rural Development Specialist (**pictured left**) states, "During the current period of prevailing high fuel costs, the opening of a sub-office will provide a more convenient location with less travel expense to local area customers for applying and receiving services under Rural

Development's various loan and grant programs."

Office hours are being held on the first (1st) Thursday of each month from 7:30 AM to 11:30 AM in the Grant County Farm Service Agency office located in the USDA Service Center along North Main Street in Petersburg, WV. The toll free telephone

number is 800-511-3093, extension 108; commercial 304-257-4702, ext. 108; and the fax number is 304-257-2467.

You can also contact Rural Development in Romney at 500 East Main Street, Suite E, Romney, WV 26747, telephone 304-822-3020 and fax 304-822-3728.



Pictured above: Rural Development Specialist Wendell Alt.

Rural Development Provides Housing Programs Information at Martinsburg Home Show



Pictured (l to r): Ruth Ann Barron, Rural Development Specialist, and Augusta Wilson, Rural Development Technician, provide information to attendees of the Martinsburg Home Show.

Self-Help Housing Loans help groups of six to ten low-income families build their own homes by providing materials and the skilled labor they cannot furnish themselves.

The families must agree to work together until all homes are finished.

March 3—5, 2006. Rural Development participated in the Martinsburg Home Show where they provided program information to the attendees of this annual event.

Rural Development programs that were highlighted for this specific occasion were the Self-Help Housing Program, Direct Single-Family Housing Program, and the Guaranteed Housing Program.

Telamon Corporation provided Rural Development with literature on Counseling and the Self-Help Housing program to have readily available for the public.

Rural Development brochures and pamphlets were available in English and Spanish versions.

In addition to Ruth Ann Barron and Augusta Wilson (**pictured to the left**), Rural Development Manager Howard Page, Rural Development Specialist Wendell Alt and Guaranteed Housing Specialist Scott Mullin greeted visitors and provided them with assistance in understanding Rural Development programs and how to apply for loans and/or grants.

The Martinsburg Rural Development office serves Berkeley, Jefferson and Morgan Counties, WV.

For more information, you can contact the Martinsburg Rural Development office at 151 Aikens Center, Suite 4, Martinsburg, WV 25401-6211; telephone 304-263-7547; fax 304-267-9172; or TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.

Harrison County Board of Education Awarded Distance Learning Grant

Harrison County Board of Education held a celebration ceremony on March 21, 2006 at the Nutter Fort Primary School to commemorate their award of a Distance Learning Grant.

Harrison County Board of Education Superintendent Carl H. Friebe, (**pictured left**) accepted a check in the amount of \$349,935 from USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe (**pictured to the right of Superintendent Friebe**).

This particular entity will utilize the funds to expand the current WAN, TI and IP telecommunication technologies to 11 additional rural schools and add the Harrison County Bureau of Emergency Services to offer new courses, virtual field trips, professional training and coordinate disaster relief in the area with state and local authorities.

The project will serve more than 11,000 students and 1,500 school board employees in 30 schools.

Board of Education Director of Technology Marcel Malfregeot stated, "They will have an open channel to Washington, to Charleston, to Homeland Security..."

Pictured below is Marissa Bailey, age 9 and a 3rd grader at Nutter Fort Intermediate School. Wearing her Grandfather's sailor hat from WWII, Marissa "belted out" the National Anthem as part of the ceremony.



Distance Learning Grant Received By Roane County Schools



Pictured (l to r): Accepting the Distance Learning Grant award on behalf of Roane County Schools is Superintendent Stephen Goffreda and Assistant Superintendent/CFO David Kinison. Presenting the award is WV USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe.

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program is designed to enhance educational and health care services in rural America.

During the past five years, USDA's Rural Development has invested over \$4.6 billion in telecommunications programs across America.

Roane County Schools held a celebration ceremony on March 22, 2006 at the Roane County High School to commemorate their award of a Distance Learning Grant. USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe and Field Representative Ron Mellon from Washington, DC, were on hand to congratulate the public school system and present them with the funds.

Roane County Schools Superintendent Stephen Goffreda and David Kinison, Roane County Schools Assistant Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer, represented the school system.

Roane County Schools was one of three recipients to be awarded Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants in the State of West Virginia. Nationwide, there were 79 recipients of these highly competitive program grant funds.

This particular entity was awarded \$485,825 to enable VOIP interactive learning. Wireless mobile learning labs will be

purchased for each elementary school which will be supplemented by notebook PCs, also whiteboards and digital projectors for teachers.

Roane County's six campuses will be the end-user sites. Over 2,500 students and faculty, as well as the county's entire population of 15,627 will benefit directly from this project.

Federal and State Government officials, stakeholders and potential grant recipients were in attendance and joined in this celebration. Among those present were representatives Dot Underwood from Governor Joe Manchin's office, Shirley Dissen from Congresswoman Capito's office, Terry Williams—Mayor of Spencer, Roane County Commissioner John Greathouse, Board of Education President Richard Boggs, Delegate Bob Ashley, Pam Hoppe—WV Office of Technology, Board of Education members and several Roane County High School principals, assistant principals, students, teachers, parents and staff.

Rural Development Employees Conduct Outreach at 2006 WV EXPO



Pictured (l to r): Rural Utilities Technician Eric Gumm and Rural Utilities Specialist Steve Collins attended the 27th annual WV EXPO.

The 27th annual West Virginia Equipment, Technology, and Design Exposition was held March 23 and 24 at the Charleston Civic Center. Representatives from Rural Development were in attendance to network and conduct outreach.

Attending from Rural Development were Randy Plum, Rural Utilities Program Director; Harry Taylor, State Civil Engineer; Chris Missimer, State Architect; Rural Utilities Specialists Janna Lowery, Virginia McDonald, Joe Crickenberger, Steve Collins and Teresa Miller; Russell Henderson, Contract Specialist;

Kevin Betler, Construction Analyst; and Rural Utilities Technicians Eric Gumm and Audrey Gwinn.

EXPO provides continuing education opportunities for the Rural Development staff. Over 60 seminars for designers, contractors, public works, and industry personnel were available. In addition, EXPO also allows the USDA Rural Development staff to make personal contact with various potential borrowers and engineering companies in an effort to promote interest in and stimulate applications for its programs.

APPLICATIONS BEING ACCEPTED FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY SYSTEMS AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS GRANTS AND GUARANTEED LOANS

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications through the Business and Cooperative Programs to purchase renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements for agriculture producers and rural small businesses in eligible rural areas.

Nationwide, the amount available for competitive grants is \$11.385 million. Approximately \$176.5 million in guaranteed loan authority is also available. Any guaranteed loan funds that are not obligated by August 1, 2006, will be pooled and revert to the National Office reserve for grant use.

USDA is currently in the process of evaluating the potential for a direct loan program to help finance renewable energy and

energy efficiency projects for rural small business and agricultural producers. Therefore, for purposes of Fiscal Year 2006, funding will be limited to grants and guaranteed loans.

For renewable energy systems, the minimum grant request is \$2,500 and the maximum is \$500,000. For energy efficiency improvements, the minimum acceptable grant request is \$1,500 and the maximum is \$250,000. The maximum amount of a guaranteed loan made to a borrower will be \$10 million. For Fiscal Year 2006, the guarantee fee amount is 1% (one percent) of the guaranteed portion of the loan and the annual renewal fee is 0.125% (one-eighth of one percent) of the guaranteed portion of the loan.

Stephens added, "Grant applications must be completed and submitted to USDA Rural Development, ATTN: Cheryl Wolfe, Business and Cooperatives Program Director, Federal Building, Suite 320, 75 High Street, Morgantown, WV 26505-7500 postmarked no later than May 12, 2006. Guaranteed loans will be awarded on a continuous basis until August 1, 2006, however, they must reach National Office for funding consideration by July 3, 2006."

Further information and application procedure can be found in the February 13 edition of the Federal Register at <http://257.gadamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-1923.htm>.



RURAL RENTAL HOUSING PROGRAM FUNDS AVAILABLE

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications through the Rural Rental Housing Guaranteed loan program (Section 515). The program is provided to increase the supply of affordable rental housing through the use of loan guarantees, which are provided by Rural Development in partnership with private lenders and public agencies.

To be eligible for funding under the program, the properties must have repair and rehabilitation costs totaling at least \$6,500 per unit. Eligible uses for loan proceeds also include construction of new units, land improvements, construction of office and maintenance buildings, community and recreational facilities, parking, landscaping, fencing and appliance purchases.

Eligible housing types include family, senior and farm labor housing properties. Occupants

must be members of very low, low or moderate income households; or elderly, handicapped and disabled persons with incomes not in excess of 115% of the area median income.

Eligible applicants for loan funds include U.S. citizens, aliens legally admitted for permanent residence, nonprofit organizations including local governments, community development groups and Indian tribes, or for-profit corporations. Rural areas with populations of up to 20,000 are eligible. Funding in the amount of \$99 million has been allocated to provide guarantees. USDA Rural Development will accept responses until all funds are expended. A notice will be placed in the Federal Register when all funds are committed for FY 2006.

Also, there is \$99 million nationwide available for Section 515

Rural Rental Housing funds, \$25,740,000 of which is available for new construction on a national competitive level.

Section 515 funds are used to make loans to individuals, corporations, associations, trusts, Indian tribes, public or private nonprofit organizations, consumer cooperatives, or partnerships to provide rental or cooperative housing and related facilities in rural areas for very-low, low or moderate income persons or families, including elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

The deadline for submitting an application for Section 515 Rural Rental Housing program funds is May 19, 2006. Individual loan requests may not exceed \$1 million and WV can receive up to \$2.5 million. Contact the WV Rural Development State Office at 304-284-4872.

"Rural Rental Housing Program funds give Rural Development the opportunity to provide more affordable housing that is decent, safe, sanitary and competitive in the market," stated Rob Stephens, State Director.



Pictured Above: Knollview Village Apartments, a 48-unit apartment complex for low-income people 55 and older, located on a five-acre knoll just west of St. Albans, at 571 MacCorkle Ave., W, in Charleston, WV. This project was funded through Rural Development's Rural Renting Housing Program.

Distance Learning Grant Received By Braxton County Schools



Pictured (l to r): Accepting the ceremonial Distance Learning Grant award check on behalf of Braxton County Schools is Board of Education President Arlene Herndon. Also pictured (l to r) are Board Members Tom Hefner, Ernie Moore and Elizabeth Stewart. Presenting the award is WV USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe.

The purpose of the Water & Waste Disposal Programs is to build, repair and improve public water systems, and waste collection & treatment systems.

Braxton County Schools held a celebration ceremony, where Superintendent Carolyn Long served as Master of Ceremonies, on April 12, 2006 at the Braxton County Middle School to commemorate their award of a Distance Learning Grant. USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe and Field Representative Ron Mellon from Washington, DC, were on hand to congratulate the public school system and present them with the funds.

Braxton County Schools was one of three recipients to be awarded Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants in the State of West Virginia. Nationwide, there were 79 recipients of these highly competitive program grant funds.

The award of \$500,000 will be used to provide distance learning with broadband technology and state-of-the-art computer labs for eight county schools.

Benefits will include increased course offerings, opportunities for professional staff development, adult basic education courses, GED classes, continuing education courses, job training courses, and on-line college and university degree programs. This project will serve 2,547 students and 4,286 residents of Braxton County.

Delegate Brent Boggs was on hand and stated, "This opportunity affords us the means to make Braxton County the most livable place in central WV by gaining access to technology so necessary in today's world and in the future. The children come first, but the community will also benefit."

Representative Dot Underwood from Governor Manchin's office and Shirley Stark Dissen of Congresswoman Capito's office were also present to extend their congratulations.

Water System Improvements Underway For Clay County



Pictured Above: Heavy equipment moves 6-inch pipe in preparation for installation in the Lizemores area.

The existing water supply in the Tuckers Bottom, Indore, Lizemores, Fola and Independence areas mainly consists of wells. Many residents in these areas have complained about the odor and taste associated with the water as well as problems with stained clothing after washing laundry.

These problems are common characteristics of groundwater and usually a result of high sulfur and iron concentrations. High concentration levels of sulfate may cause health conditions.

Some residents have classified the water as unfit to drink and purchase bottled water for consumption. Residents have also mentioned that mining activities in the southern end of Clay County have caused groundwa-

ter wells to become dry.

USDA Rural Development's Water and Waste Disposal Program provided funding for Clay County Public Service District in the amount of \$2,523,000 (\$623,000 in loan funds and \$1,900,000 in grant funds) to improve the current water treatment plant and extend water services to the Tuckers Bottom, Incore, Lizemores, Fola and Independence areas. The loan closing date was December 19, 2005.

Construction began shortly after loan closing. The improvements will optimize the existing water treatment plant and extend water services to approximately 325 residents, providing the new customers with a safe, reliable water source.

Section 525 Technical and Supervisory Assistance (TSA) Grants Funding Available

Rural Housing Programs announces it is soliciting applications under its Technical and Supervisory Assistance (TSA) grant program. Grants will be awarded to eligible applicant organizations to conduct programs of technical and supervisory assistance for low-income rural residents to obtain and/or maintain occupancy of adequate housing.

The deadline for receipt of pre-application proposals is May 17, 2006.

The policy of USDA Rural Development is to provide technical and supervisory assistance to eligible applicants to do the following: (1) Provide home-

ownership and financial counseling to reduce both the potential for delinquency by loan applicants and the level of payment delinquency by present Rural Development housing loan borrowers; and (2) Facilitate the delivery of housing programs to serve the most needy low-income families in rural areas of greatest need for housing.

The objectives of the TSA Grant Program are to assist low-income rural families in obtaining adequate housing to meet their family's needs and/or to provide the necessary guidance to promote their continued occupancy of already adequate housing. These objectives will be accomplished through the establishment or support of housing delivery and counseling projects run by eligible applicants.

Up to \$1,000,000 in competitive grants will be awarded to eligible applicants. No single award will exceed \$100,000. No more than one grant per State and/or applicant will be awarded.

Applications are due to the West Virginia Rural Development State Office, ATTN: Dianne Goff Crysler, 75 High Street, Suite 320, Morgantown, WV 26505-7500 no later than May 17, 2006.

Application information and further information on this Notice of Funds Availability can be found in the April 17 edition of the Federal Register at: <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-5688.htm>.

The performance period of a Technical and Supervisory Assistance (TSA) Grant will be two years from the date the grant agreement is executed.

The Historically Black Land Grant Universities were created by the second Morrill Act, in 1890, following the signing of the first Morrill Act by President Lincoln in 1862.

USDA Rural Development Expands Partnership With West Virginia State University

West Virginia State University, located at Institute, WV, began as a historically black university and has evolved into a fully accessible, racially diverse, and multi-generational institution of higher learning.

The Southern WV Rural Business Development Outreach Initiative, started in 2003, covers 11 counties in West Virginia: Fayette, Greenbrier, Mercer, McDowell, Monroe, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Raleigh, Summers, Webster and Wyoming.

A current project will expand the WV Specialty Foods Cooperative by helping to recruit and develop new members. The West Virginia "culinary competition" will allow new specialty food product entrepreneurs to compete for prizes during the West Virginia State Fair. The winning food product/producer will receive a prize package that will help them take their recipe from an idea to a finished product with labeling, testing, and marketing ready for sale to the public. A new specialty foods business is the planned result of the project.

Through a grant awarded by USDA Rural Development, the 1890 Institutions are asked to provide technical assistance for business creation, to conduct educational programs that develop and improve the professional skills of rural entrepreneurs, and to provide outreach and promote USDA Rural Development programs in small rural communities with the greatest economic need.

West Virginia State's representative for the program is Ms. Stacy Turner. She is working on a variety of activities in support of economic development in rural areas.

Anyone interested in entering the food competition should contact Ms. Turner, West Virginia State University, Rural Business Services Program Coordinator, 97 Park Avenue, Memorial Building, Hinton, WV, telephone 304-466-7113.



Pictured Above: Ms. Stacy Turner, West Virginia State University's representative for the Southern WV Rural Development Outreach Initiative.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT ANNOUNCES COMMUNITY CONNECT GRANT PROGRAM

USDA Rural Development State Director Robert M. Steptoe, III, announces the availability of \$8.9 million nationwide in Community Connect Grants for broadband transmission service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety services.

"Broadband transmission service is vital to economic development, education, health and safety for rural Americans," stated Steptoe.

The purpose of the Community Connect Grant Program is to

provide financial assistance in the form of grants to eligible applicants that will provide broadband transmission service on a "community-oriented connectivity" basis.

Priority will be given to rural areas that have the greatest need for broadband transmission services, enabling connection of essential community facilities in rural towns and communities where no broadband service exists.

The deadline to apply is May 15, 2006 and there is no maximum

application amount for Fiscal Year 2006. However, there is a \$50,000 minimum.

The application guide, copies of the necessary forms and samples, and the Community Connect Grant Program regulation are available on the internet at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/commconnect.htm> or <http://www.grants.gov>.

For paper copies of these materials, please contact USDA Rural Development, Broadband Division, at 202-690-4673.



USDA Rural Development's Mission: To increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all Rural Americans.

USDA Rural Development's Vision: A Rural America that is a Healthy, Safe & Prosperous Place to Live and Work.

RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS BEING ACCEPTED

The primary objective of the Rural Business Opportunity Grant program is to improve the economic conditions of rural areas. Assistance provided to rural areas under this program may include technical assistance for business development and economic development planning.

Nationwide, a total of \$990,000 of non-earmarked funds is available for this program for Fiscal Year 2006. A total of \$990,000 has been earmarked for Native Americans, and a total of \$990,000 earmarked for Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Communities and Rural Economic Area Partnerships. There

is no project dollar amount limitation for earmarked funds.

Competitive grants of up to \$50,000 per application may be requested from the non-earmarked funds. For multi-state projects, grant funds of up to \$150,000 will be available on a competitive basis.

The deadline for the receipt of applications in the Rural Development State Office is May 26, 2006. Any applications received after that date will not be considered for Fiscal Year 2006 funding.

For further information, entities wishing to apply for assistance

should contact John Comerchi, Rural Business and Cooperative Programs Specialist, 481 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV 25801, telephone 304-253-9597 (extension 146), fax 304-252-5809, or TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.

Completed applications should be mailed to the West Virginia Rural Development State Office, 75 High Street, Suite 320, Morgantown, WV 26505-7500.

Further information can be found in the March 15 edition of the Federal Register at <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-3762.htm>.

To be eligible for a Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG), applicants must be a public body, nonprofit corporation, Indian tribe, or cooperative with members that are primarily rural residents.

OVER \$10 MILLION IN SECTION 533 HOUSING PRESERVATION GRANTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2006

Nationwide, there is over \$10 million available through the Section 533 Housing Preservation Grant (HPG) funds for Fiscal Year 2006.

The Housing Preservation Grant program is a grant program which provides qualified public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and other eligible entities grant funds to assist very low- and low-income homeowners in repairing and rehabilitating their homes in rural areas.

In addition, this program assists rental property owners and cooperative housing complex

owners in repairing and rehabilitating their units if they agree to make such units available to low- and very low-income persons.

The deadline for submitting a grant application for this program is May 19, 2006. No maximum or minimum grant level has been established at the National level. However, you can contact Penny Thaxton at 91 Boyles Lane, Parkersburg, WV 26104, telephone 304-422-9070, fax 304-422-9074 or TTY/TDD 304-284-4836 for state allocation information.

Further information on the Housing Preservation Grant program and application requirements can be found in the March 20 edition of the Federal Register at <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/06-2451.htm>, on USDA Rural Development's website at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/> or by contacting the West Virginia Rural Development State Office at 75 High Street, Suite 320, Morgantown, WV 26505-7500, telephone 304-284-4868, fax 304-284-4893 or TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.

Please note that Housing Preservation Grant Funds will not be made to individual homeowners, but rather to eligible applicants as described to the left.

USDA Rural Development serves as the lead Federal entity for rural development needs and administers program assistance through its rural housing programs, rural business programs and rural utilities programs.

RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AVAILABLE TO FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rural Cooperative Development Grants are available through USDA Rural Development to assist in cooperative development ventures by establishing and operating cooperative development centers as part of the ongoing effort by the Bush Administration to increase economic opportunities in rural areas.

Nationwide, there is \$4.45 million available in this program funding. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis and are intended to foster rural cooperative development through projects that provide rural residents with education and technical assistance in areas of business and cooperative startup, market-

ing, managing and other self-help tools.

Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe remarked, "These centers for rural cooperative development offer our rural citizens the resources they need to support the expansion of economic opportunities within their community."

Grants may be made to nonprofit corporations and institutions of higher education. Grants may not be made to public bodies or for-profit entities.

The deadline for submitting a grant application is May 20, 2006. The maximum award per grant is

\$225,000 and matching funds are required.

Further information on this program and application requirements can be found in the March 20 edition of the Federal Register at <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-4006.htm>, on USDA Rural Development's website at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm> or by contacting John Comerici, Rural Business and Cooperatives Specialist, 481 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV 25801, telephone 304-253-9597 (extension 146), fax 304-252-5809 or TTY/TDD 304-284-4836.

"These centers for rural cooperative development offer our rural citizens the resources they need to support the expansion of economic opportunities within their community," remarked Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe.

Federal Building, Suite 320
 75 High Street
 Morgantown, WV 26505-7500

Phone: 304-284-4860 OR 800-295-8228
 Fax: 304-284-4893; TTY/TDD 304-284-4836
Gail.Bennett@wv.usda.gov

Almost Heaven WV
 Mountain State Rural Express



We're on the Web!

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>



If you are receiving this newsletter via mail and would rather receive it via e-mail, please forward Gail Bennett, Editor, your request to Gail.Bennett@wv.usda.gov.

“Celebrating Community: A Tribute to Black Fraternal, Social and Civic Institutions”

February 22, 2006. This is the date that employees of the Harley O. Staggers Federal Building in Morgantown, WV chose to celebrate American History Month through their, as the theme states, tribute to Black Fraternal, Social and Civic Institutions.

Charlotte Meade, a retired educator and self-publisher of “In My Time...A Collection of Poetry and Other Written Expressions,” was the guest speaker and shared with the audience some of her perspectives on the subject.

Ms. Meade also shared some of her poetry and thoughts that date back to the 1960s.

Employees from USDA Rural Development, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and USDA Farm Service Agency listened intently and shared a few laughs with Ms. Meade as she enlightened the group.

In the Summer of 2000, Charlotte wrote the following poem entitled, “IT’S HARD TO UNRING A BELL”

I reach out to you.

You accept my hand in yours
 But crush my fingers.

I feel the pain, but do not say
 “Why did you respond this way?”
 You loosen your grip.

I withdraw my hand from yours,
 Today’s lesson learned.

You sense my complete surprise.
 You say, “I apologize.”

Deeds done, some undone,
 Leave deep scars that can’t be hid,
 Even though denied.

I forgive,
 But suspicions swell.

It’s hard to unring a bell.

This is just a sample of the “Food for Thought” that Ms. Meade left this group with as they commemorated this occasion. Another date of history in the making.....



Leonard Jackson, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services Special Emphasis Program liaison, presented Ms. Charlotte Meade with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the Harley O. Staggers Federal Building employees.